Eighteenth-Century Fiction

Volume 17 | Issue 2 Article 6

1-31-2005

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Recommended Citation

Erickson, Robert (2005) "Review of: James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics and Literary Culture, 1630–1685*; and Pamela Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes: Enlightenment Globalization and the Placing of Sex*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*: Vol. 17: Iss. 2, Article 6.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol17/iss2/6

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This article is available in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol17/iss2/6

Reviews/Comptes rendus

James Grantham Turner. *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics and Literary Culture, 1630–1685*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xviii+366pp. 45euros. ISBN 0521782791.

Pamela Cheek. *Sexual Antipodes: Enlightenment Globalization and the Placing of Sex*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. xi+246pp. US$49.50. ISBN 0-8047-4663-X.

The subject of "libertinism," like those other vexed subjects "homosexuality," "pornography," "venereal disease," and "antinomianism," to name a few, is important to eighteenth-century fiction in a variety of ways. This review essay will discuss the related critical fortunes of libertinism and pornography in two recent complementary books, with glances at others. The writings of James Grantham Turner have become, in the past two decades, a starting place for all discussions of "libertinism" in early modern Europe, but especially in English culture. In two articles that appeared in the late 1980s, Turner attempted to define, or at least characterize, libertinism in all its paradoxical significations. In "The Properties of Libertinism," *Eighteenth Century Life* 9:3 (1985), 75–87, he surveyed modern and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century definitions of the topic and came to the conclusion that questions about the nature and development of libertinism in the early modern period reflected

> two different approaches to the history of ideas, one expansive, or maximalist, the other restrictive, or minimalist. The former depicts libertinism as a broad movement of sensibility, evolving towards cultured hedonism and incorporating the ideals of rakish vitality, psychological honesty, and a fair-minded assumption of combative equality between the sexes. The latter imposes sharp distinctions between the genuine libertine, and the more agreeable aspects of the late seventeenth-century mentality; it limits the duration, typicality, and influence of libertinism, and seeks to deny altogether its hegemony in English Restoration literature. (77)

He then went on to discuss the religious meanings of libertinism and offered the following formulation:

> there is no necessary connection, much less identity, between the religious and secular applications of "libertinism." The word refers, not to a single entity with different facets, but to three distinct movements of thought or clusters of attitudes: religious ("spiritual") libertinism, philosophical libertinism (the combination of antireligious skepticism and scientific materialism), ... and sexual libertinism. (79)

In the other article, "Lovelace and the Paradoxes of Libertinism," in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 70–88, he focused on Richardson's Lovelace as the primary eighteenth-century avatar of

> erotic libertinism ... the melange of Ovidian seduction-theory and Epicurean philosophy that Richardson found in the court wits of Charles II and in the seducer-heroes of Restoration drama and early eighteenth-century fiction ... . these antecedents of Lovelace are torn between two roles; they proclaim their allegiance to Wit and Sense, but they are unable to reconcile the two components of this libertine character, intellectual brilliance and passionate sensuality. (71)

I have quoted Turner's own formulations instead of paraphrasing them in order to indicate his careful delineation of a slippery and multi-faceted topic.

At least ten years in the making and with the help of four major grants, *Libertines and Radicals*, as the subtitle indicates, covers a rich fifty-five-year period of the seventeenth century, ending with the reign of Charles II. (It should be noted that Turner's companion volume, *Schooling Sex: Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France, and England: 1534–1685*, appeared in 2003. The appearance of these two books is a major publishing event in seventeenth-century studies.) Evident on nearly every page is the influence of Bakhtin on the social and bodily "lower stratum," of Stallybrass and White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, of contemporary British microhistory, of Christopher Hill, Foucault, and McKeon on all kinds of "status confusion," of the current expository stylistic double-principle (for example, "the 'riding' or anti-procession ... at once humiliating and triumphant" [32]). Starting with Jane Barker's phrase, the "Deluge of Libertinism, which has overflow'd the Age," and combining this term with the "popular Libertinism" that Evelyn found rampant in the streets of London and with (over) recurrent reference to Milton's "Sons of Belial" and "vagabond lust," Turner's major conceptual innovation in this book (with help from Stallybrass and White's reading of Bakhtin) is an exploration of the nature and interpenetration of "low" and "high" libertinism in a great many of its political, social, religious, and sexual implications.

Going well beyond the sparse *OED* definition (and sampling) of "libertine" and "libertinism" ("freedom of opinion or non-recognition of authority as to religion ... . Disregard of moral restraint, esp. in relations between the sexes"), Turner now gives an initial definition of libertinism as "the discourses and rituals that constituted illicit, transgressive sexuality in the early modern period" (ix), and says, more expansively, the word "'libertine' in early modern Europe could denote a challenge to orthodox religion, an attempt to construct an authentic self on the basis of the passions, a loosening of family bonds and respect for maternal authority, or a deliberate celebration of ... 'loose Gallantry' ... . Libertinism was not so much a philosophy as a set of performances" (x). Hence, his characterization of "libertinism" takes new turns and byways. But in a revealing and forthright declaration in response to the putative goal of "new cultural studies" (as formulated by John Bender in a 1992 article), Turner says he aims to read "texts and gestures simultaneously as imaginative artefacts and consequential documents ... . I treat the text (however trashy) as a signifying practice in its own right, and not as an example of discourse-in-general or as raw material from which historical truth must be extracted" (xiv). In the process, he takes "porno-political" analysis of seventeenth-century texts (especially those from the "urban lower stratum" [10]) farther than anyone else has, and makes an important contribution (with the careful use of Kristeva on abjection) to our understanding of writing about and by women in this period. He gives perhaps less attention to genuinely "aesthetic" artifacts (at least canonical ones) than he claims. The writing here, subject to a certain repetitiveness in its verbal pyrotechnics and some turgidity in the piling on of examples (see 135–50), does not have the elegance of Turner's excellent *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (1987), one of the three or four most impressive books on Milton in the last twenty years, but this is an important and original study, and nearly as relevant for eighteenth-century studies as for seventeenth-century studies, as I hope to suggest.

The introductory chapter on *pornographia*, Turner's coinage for writings and gestures by, about, and on the body of the prostitute, who is seen as both subject and agent of sexual discourse, has multiple implications for the "whore literature" of the eighteenth century, about which I have written in *Mother Midnight* (1986), using some of the same seventeenth-century sources, such as *The Crafty Whore*, *The Wandering Whore*, and *The Whore's Rhetoric*. This introduction is particularly relevant to the works of Swift (especially the earlier satires), Hogarth, and even Pope, to the fictions of Behn, Defoe, Haywood and other female authors of amatory fiction, and to Richardson (and to a lesser extent, Cleland and Sterne). It constitutes the fullest (and grittiest) account I know of early modern "high" and "low" prostitution as it is represented in the "festive-violent" (49) print culture of the period, and the notes (for this chapter and the others) are a trove of information,

scholarly and otherwise (see 284n2 on the origin of the term "Carnelevation" [33]). After discussions of shaming rituals and political pornography of the Interregnum, the final three chapters and epilogue, set mostly in the Restoration, are also (like the introduction) relevant to eighteenth-century issues of gender, sexuality, and class. They discuss the rise of the female libertine (exemplified by the Countess of Castlemaine) and explore "high" libertinism in the "age of Rochester" and the life and writings of Wycherley, in particular, but with intriguing asides on "Aphra Behn, and other women authors who criticize libertine debauch even as they register its allure" (197), such as Cavendish and Polwhele. Other women "authors" in the gestural/performative sense would include Nell Gwyn and Castlemaine.

Turner anticipates the point of this last chapter early on: "Rochester and his contemporaries sought a kind of sublimity in abjection," a kind of Libertine Sublime, "by recasting 'wild debauchery' as *pose* or *attitude*, detached and aestheticized. They differentiated themselves from the world of 'popular Libertinism' ... by expropriating the carnivalesque lower stratum to assert aristocratic privilege" (45). Turner expands on this theme, arguing that authors like Wycherley and Rochester drag down false nobility at the same time that they are elevating low-libertine elements into the most respectable genres and prestigious public venues, a kind of "trickle up effect" (246). This is not a strikingly new insight: similar kinds of aristocratic incorporation of the lower stratum were going on in medieval fabliaux and in Renaissance dramatic literature for a variety of reasons. Earlier, in "Lovelace and the Paradoxes of Libertinism," Turner had called attention to the "conceptual tangle at the centre of libertinism—the relation between language, sexuality and individual liberty" (80). Perhaps Rochester and the "Mob of Gentlemen who wrote with Ease" were searching for limits and reasserting upper-level status (as Turner and others have suggested) in a post–Civil War political and social climate that still felt radically unstable. But in the emphasis on abjection, the aristocratic libertine aligns himself with the Otherness of the shamed but rebellious whore and seems to need the abjected woman in order to define and interpret himself to himself (and to his brother rakes), somewhat in the manner of the Magistrate in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress*, Tom Rakewell is juxtaposed to the shamed but loyal Sarah in almost every plate, and she cradles him in the pieta of the final scene in Bedlam. Turner's insight also affords an interesting context for further interpretation of the motive forces of the great libertines of eighteenth-century fiction, especially Richardson's Lovelace, about whom he has written with such flair and originality. The view of the dynamics of Rochesterian libertinism offered here might be explained in such a way as to qualify Turner's earlier interpretation of Lovelace's basic instability, emptiness, and "essential passivity." No one, to my knowledge, has yet analysed comprehensively and convincingly how Richardson transformed the Restoration rake, especially "Rochester," as "performance-artist" (233) and as author, into Lovelace.

Pamela Cheek's *Sexual Antipodes* (of special interest to readers of *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* for its English-French emphasis) is a sophisticated and erudite discussion of how the idea of sexual order and disorder became a primary category for defining modern national and racial identity, and imagining "globalization," in British and French print culture of the Enlightenment. The trendy term "globalization" here means "the Western European sense that developed over the course of the eighteenth century of living in a known world connected by navigation and print, by the mixing of peoples and knowledges" (2), and the term is employed to talk about the first British and French encounters with Tahiti (around 1770) and how the idea of sex began to play a key role in the emerging European sense of "being placed on the globe." Cheek is a recent graduate of the John Bender school of higher cultural criticism at Stanford. Her book is much different from Turner's in its scope and the ambition of its argument, but the two scholars employ similar expository styles and use similar sources. Instead of focusing intently on the porno-political implications of libertinism in a single metropolis, as Turner does for seventeenth-century London, Cheek, following the interpretive co-ordinates laid down by Linda Colley in *Britons: Forging the Nation* (1992), whereby England and France defined themselves in terms of each Other, offers a theory of "metropolitan contestation" between the "metropoles" of England and France, in the context of South Sea colonization, under the aspect of sexual placement. The reader uninitiated in "metropolitan" post-colonialist criticism has to work to discover that "metropole" here does not refer to a city but to a nation (literally "mother state"), and Cheek might have done more with "matrix"-like overtones of this key term. As she puts it, her book

> develops two central contentions: first, identity in modernity is contingent on the placing of sexuality; second, in the eighteenth century, colonial representations were the field in which competing metropoles expressed binding notions of sexual identity. I consider the organization of identity around the placing of sex that occurred during a second phase of globalization by exploring its roots in Enlightenment contestatory metropolitan politics. (7)

This last sentence is not quite so bad as "Encounter reconfigured contestatory anxiety about civility and institutions into a privileging of transparent sensibility and bio-cultural regeneration" (9), but I must say that the articulation of the theoretical underpinning of this book is somewhat confusing.

Fortunately, there are some generous compensations. The book is divided into two main parts, "Metropolitan Allegories" and "Antipodes." I found the first part the more informative and useful in relation to eighteenth-century fiction and the topics of libertinism and "pornography," though there is not so much about "libertinism" as such. Cheek points out early on that even though her argument does not privilege the novel but reads it contiguously

with other genres (13), she does give considerable attention to English and mainly French fictions with strong elements of "sensibility," sexuality, and the "pornographic" (and here "pornography," as for Turner, is mainly fictional writing about prostitutes), such as Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Diderot's *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, Restif de la Bretonne's *Decouverte australe par un homme* and *Le pornographe*, Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, and Sade's *Aline et Valcour, ou le roman philosophique*. She also makes intriguing forays into fantasy representations of the female body in the known (*Gulliver's Travels*) and the unknown (Robert Paltock's *Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins*, 1750–51; French translation, 1763), with nice occasional side glances—Joseph Banks's seeing upper-class Tahitians as being "like Comus in Milton entered into a resolution of enjoying free liberty in love without a possibility of being troubled by or disturbed by its consequences" (26).

Particularly impressive for their breadth of research and their ingenuity (and relevance to early modern fiction) are her discussions of the French actress as both exalted and degraded, the rich French police records of prostitution in the eighteenth century, and the two sub-genres of early modern pornography: works allegorizing woman-as-land and land-as-woman, and proposals for the ideal brothel envisioned first by Mandeville and then elaborated in late eighteenth-century French versions. Obviously the emphasis here is on French material of the period, but its influence on and symbiotic relationship with the English texts is carefully weighed. Also noteworthy is how Cheek's discussion of these topics makes a suggestive eighteenth-century counter-discourse to Turner's discussion of the porno-political in the "metropole" of seventeenth-century London. Cheek's overall argument in this chapter is that "British pornography, British public language and public life were represented as successfully de-libidinized following the Restoration. In French pornography, on the other hand, sex was the motor of public life, for better or for worse" (83). The unhappily perpetuated Freudian term "de-libidinized" goes back to Stallybrass and White, who argue that "the coffee-house was one of the places in which *the space of discourse was being systematically decathected* ... . The emergence of the public sphere required that its spaces of discourse be *de-libidinized* in the interests of serious, productive and *rational* intercourse" (97). This is a useful but limited insight, as the authors recognize, one that must be qualified by Terry Castle's *Masquerade and Civilization* (1986), and other more recent studies of decidedly non-rational eighteenth-century public spaces of "discourse."

Cheek's account of the French actress (whose acting life was considered virtually continuous with prostitution) and of women in the eighteenth-century French sex industry is beneficial cultural history, drawing upon the voluminous *Mémoires secrets*, a chronicle of the Parisian cultural world between 1762 and 1775, and the extensive police records of a number of brothels

operating mid-century. Cheek focuses her discussion of the French actress on the adventures of the remarkable Mlle Raucourt, who endorses Pope's famous dictum about women and argues for limitless excess: "in this century of fashion morals are but apery [une singerie], prejudices are a song, and wisdom is folly. We are libertines at heart" (62). In a passage worth comparing with Turner on Castlemaine or Nell Gwyn, Cheek notes that "if in her exalted character before the people the star actress presented an ideal spectacle of nobility, in her debased character she acted as a comic foil" (57). Cheek and Turner both draw upon *The Whore's Rhetorick* for their arguments about the performative actress/royal mistress, and their comments are relevant to works as diverse as *Manon Lescaut* and *Roxana*. Both scholars also converge briefly in their discussions of early modern French and English pornographic fictions, especially what might be called "geographical" pornography in such works as *Erotopolis, The Present State of Betty-Land* (1684), in which possession of "the land" by the quasi-divine royal body was being replaced by a communal one of Englishmen leagued homosocially together; Thomas Stretser's very popular *A New Description of Merryland* (1740), which parodies empiricist discourse while using allegory to teach a privileged language; and John Wilkes's *An Essay on Woman* (1763), an exercise on the woman-as-land figure that asserted "the Science of Woman is of all Sciences the most difficult" (97). Works by Wilkes, Stretser, and many other Restoration and eighteenth-century authors (and scholars of the period) mentioned in this review essay are discussed in Raymond Stephanson's *The Yard of Wit: Male Creativity and Sexuality, 1650–1750* (2004), the most important recent work on early modern sexuality.

The woman-as-land metaphor has its richest early modern representation (in comparison with early anatomies) in Milton's depiction of paradise in book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, a predominantly feminine image that incorporates the masculine in androgynous interplay, as I have tried to show in *The Language of the Heart* (1997). Cheek's discussion of geographical pornographies culminates with her account of how Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* is the exception that proves the rule that the English produced little homegrown pornography, and most of this was "para-literature," an assertion by Peter Wagner, which she affirms (82, 99). Such an assertion seems a bit too easy if one surveys the five volumes of the recent collection *Eighteenth-Century British Erotica* (2002; gen. ed. Alexander Pettit and Patrick Spedding), not referred to by either Cheek or Turner. Of the fifty-three works reprinted in that collection, only three are clearly translations from the French, and nine are variations on one French source, the "fifteen comforts" genre. None of these works achieves the linguistic vividness and facility of Cleland's "homegrown" masterpiece, but in spite of the "Grub Street" origins of many of them, they have their individual uniqueness and, at times,

excellence. Cheek is perhaps more successful and illuminating in her localized discussions of topics such as the ideal brothel (a real tour de force) than in her theoretical efforts aimed at "placing sex" in the new global world of the later eighteenth century, though her arguments are always substantiated and provocative. Conversely, one might have wished that Turner had offered more in the way of a theoretical overview than the almost unrelieved "Deluge" of local libertinage and radicalism he so expertly serves up and analyses. Finally, I wish to call attention to the lamentable omission of bibliographies (apparently current university press policy for Cambridge, Stanford, and others).

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Richard Nash. *Wild Enlightenment: The Borders of Human Identity in the Eighteenth Century.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003. 248pp. US39.50. ISBN 0-8139-2165-1.

While general consent would be given to the idea that the struggle over notions of "nature" and "wilderness" and "savagery" was central to the Enlightenment and to eighteenth-century thought more generally, little attention has been paid to the exemplars of wildness who were examined and assessed by writers and scientists of the period, constituting a complex *alter ego* (the "wild man") to the abstraction of the "citizen of Enlightenment," who comes to embody the ideal inhabitant of the emerging public sphere. Richard Nash unearths the stories of these "wild men" and demonstrates in convincing detail the impact they had on literary texts that are now too often read in ignorance of historical context.

Nash's century runs from 1699 to 1818, but the book focuses intensively on particular years: 1726, 1773, and 1816. Its "wild men" include Tyson's orang-outang, "Lord Peter," the Wild Youth of Hameln, and Victor of Aveyron—the best known of feral children, in part because of François Truffaut's film *L'Enfant sauvage.* The literary texts illuminated by *Wild Enlightenment* include *Gulliver's Travels, Robinson Crusoe,* and *Frankenstein.*

The critical thrust of *Wild Enlightenment* is historicist in the sense that it encourages us to understand the terms of early eighteenth-century debates before the consolidation of terminology (and thought) that we associate with Linnaeus. "Human" was still a deeply contested term, and Nash's book brilliantly illuminates some of the debates around the notion, debates that